

corrected the delineation of part of the coast-line in Prince Regent's Inlet. Altogether the book is full of instruction and healthy entertainment; the map and illustrations add to its value in both respects.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

#### Antares

IN reference to the apparent change in the angle of the companion to  $\alpha$  Scorpii as shown by the recent measures of Mr. Wilson (NATURE, vol. xi. p. 274), an arrangement of the following, which, so far as I am aware, are all the measures that have been made of this beautiful pair since its discovery by Mitchel in 1845, may prove interesting. From a comparison of these earlier results it is evident that no sensible variation has taken place; and it is probable that in the last, either a slight error has been made in reading the position circle, or the observation was taken under too unfavourable conditions to admit of a high degree of accuracy. The details of these measures will be found in the several publications mentioned below.\*

1. Mitchel ... ..	1846.7	P = 270	D = 2.51
2. Dawes ... ..	1848.0	273.2	3.46
3. Bond ... ..	1848.3	275.3	3.8
4. Mädler ... ..	1849.7	276.2	3.69
5. Powell ... ..	1855.7	274.6	—
6. Secchi ... ..	1856.4	273.5	3.00
7. Jacob ... ..	1857.2	275.1	3.44
8. Wrottesley ... ..	1858.3	275.9	3.30
9. Powell ... ..	1861.1	271.9	—
10. Dawes ... ..	1864.4	275.7	3.67
11. Dembowski ... ..	1865.6	270.4	2.99
12. Secchi ... ..	1866.0	272.9	2.92
13. Wilson ... ..	1873.4	268.7	3.46

Dawes, in connection with his last measures, says, "there is very little, if any, ground for supposing change has occurred in this splendid but difficult object." The difficulty of seeing the small star in this latitude, as in the case of Sirius and its companion, arises not from its closeness or faintness, but from atmospheric causes due to its southern declination. Mitchel called the small star 11.12 magnitude, but Dawes, Secchi, and others rate it at about 8 m., which is more nearly what it appears to be at the present time. With a very steady air I have several times seen it perfectly with a 6-inch Clark refractor contracted to  $3\frac{3}{4}$  inch, and on one or two occasions with  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inch.

Chicago, March 2

S. W. BURNHAM

#### Storm Warnings from the United States

ALLUSION has recently been made in NATURE to a proposal for the transmission of weather telegrams from the United States to Europe, as likely to afford valuable data for forecasting the weather on our coasts. Some misconception appears to me to attach to this subject.

Having worked for a considerable time at the comparison of United States with European weather charts and reports, I would express my opinion that the project referred to would be undesirable, on the following grounds:—

1. Only a small proportion of the storms experienced on the American side of the Atlantic can subsequently be distinctly traced in Europe at all.

2. Of those thus traceable, the majority are felt severely only in the extreme north of Europe, and are not productive of serious results on the coasts of Great Britain, France, or Denmark.

\* 1. Sidereal Messenger, Sept. 1846.

2. Memoirs of the R.A.S., vol. xxxv.

4. Communicated to Dawes.

5. Memoirs of the R.A.S., vol. xxxii.

6. Memorie dell' Osservatorio del Collegio Romano, 1859.

7. Memoirs of the R.A.S., vol. xxviii.

8. Memoirs of the R.A.S., vol. xxix.

9. Memoirs of the R.A.S., vol. xxxii.

10. Memoirs of the R.A.S., vol. xxxv.

11. Astronomische Nachrichten, 1574.

12. Astronomische Nachrichten, 1614.

3. The rapidity of their progress varies indefinitely, and could not be deduced, *pace* Mr. Draper, from the velocity of the currents experienced in them, even if the latter were not variable also.

4. Many of our most destructive European storms occur when pressures over the Eastern States are tolerably high and steady, and appear to be developed on the Atlantic near the eastern limits of the area of high pressure. In such instances attention to the telegrams would in all probability mislead (at least until the relations of areas of high pressures to those of low pressures be better understood), and thus lead to unfortunate consequences.

For these reasons I believe that the utility of a system of weather telegrams from North America to Europe would be by no means commensurate with the serious expense involved in it.

The connection between the weather periods on this and on the other side of the Atlantic is one of the problems which the progress of research is steadily, though slowly, attacking. But such research can be carried on without embarking on a system of weather telegraphy which is unlikely to be practically beneficial, and the failure of which might rather tend to bring this branch of the science into disrepute.

W. CLEMENT LEY

Ashby Parva, Lutterworth, March 12

#### Meteorological Observations in the Pacific

IN the leader on "Meteorology—Present and Future" which appeared in NATURE, vol. x. p. 99, it is said: "In order to complete the preliminary meteorological survey of the earth's atmosphere and surface it is indispensable that measures be taken to obtain observations from the less frequented regions of the ocean, from Arctic and Antarctic regions, large portions of British America, South America, Africa, and Polynesia." It is also very correctly observed that "in working out the great question of *local climates* it is absolutely indispensable that uniformity as regards instruments and methods of observation be secured at the different stations."

The meteorology of the Pacific has often occupied my attention, and I have regretted that no systematic effort was made to secure regular observations upon some uniform plan throughout the islands occupied by missionaries. The principal islands in Eastern, Central, and Western Polynesia (as far as the New Hebrides) have gentlemen residing on them, many of whom would (I have good reason to believe) be willing to render assistance in this work. Indeed, many of them are accustomed, already, to make more or less meteorological observations, so far as the reading of the barometer and thermometer goes. But these observations, if collected, would at present be comparatively useless, owing to the want of "uniformity as regards instruments and methods of observation."

Should measures be taken to secure such observations as those suggested in the article above mentioned, and should means be found for supplying (say *lending*, under certain conditions) instruments to those who are willing to become observers, I believe the co-operation of missionaries in most, if not all, of the following islands may be secured, viz., Society Islands, Hervey or Cook's Islands, Niue or Savage Island, Friendly or Tongan Islands, Samoa or Navigators' Islands, Fiji Islands, Loyalty Islands, the New Hebrides, and the south-east peninsula of New Guinea.

I shall be happy to do what I can to bring about such a result. I am willing to correspond with any gentleman representing the "Central Department," or with the secretary of any society which may undertake the work, with regard to details.

Upolu, Samoa, Nov. 16, 1874

S. J. WHITMEE

#### Struck by Lightning

THE following is offered you for publication in the hope that the facts were observed accurately enough to be of value, and in the belief that reliable accounts of similar experiences are rare.

The house, in which with my family I have spent the winter, stands in the centre of Torbay and close to the sea. In the garden, which gives access to the shore, is a flagstaff (once belonging to the Coast Guard) 50 feet high, with a metal vane at the top, and having the mast steadied at about 25 feet from the ground in the usual way with iron wire guys. About a foot above ground each wire rope terminates in a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch chain which is anchored a few feet in the soil. These chains are much

corroded, their original diameter being reduced here and there to  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch.

February 25th was a rainy day during the forenoon, with heavy wind from the south-east, but in the afternoon the sky cleared. There had been no sign of thunder all day. At 5 P.M. my wife, my son, and myself were standing under the flagstaff and within 10 feet of a mooring chain, watching the bay, when the vane was suddenly struck by lightning, which broke the mast short off in two places, tearing and splitting the wood between the vane and the iron guy ropes. Through these the discharge then passed to the ground, but three out of the four mooring chains were broken. Not only one, but many links in each of these chains were snapped, both above and below ground, and several of the links were broken in two places at once. The fractures were crystalline and showed no signs of heat. On the garden path, and within a yard of myself, stood an iron roller, towards which the discharge ploughed two shallow furrows in the gravel; one of these is 8 feet long and terminates in a splash of gravel upon the roller.

The broken mast and vane fell to the ground close to us. The former was blackened from end to end around half its circumference, and the edges of the discoloration form ragged splashes. The brass tube forming the vane was ripped open, and all solder about the vane melted. Below the point where the wire ropes were attached to it the mast was uninjured. Shivered fragments of the staff were found on the ground as far as 150 feet to windward. Heavy hail followed the flash, the wind falling instantly to a dead calm; a second but distant flash was seen twenty minutes later, after which there was no more lightning. The discharge startled the whole village of Paignton; the coast guard officer compares the explosion to that of a 300-pounder gun; and at Torquay,  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles distant, a scientific friend speaks of both flash and crash as most terrific.

I must now attempt to describe the effects on ourselves and the impressions on our senses, though I am conscious of difficulty in avoiding subjective matter here. Of the three, my wife only was "struck," and fell to the ground, my son and myself remaining erect, and all three retaining consciousness. For more than half an hour my wife lost the use of her lower limbs and left hand, both of which became rigid. From the feet to the knees she was splashed with rose-coloured tree-like marks, branching upwards, while a large tree-like mark, with six principal branches diverging from a common centre, thirteen inches in its largest diameter, and bright rose red, covered the body. None of us are certain of having seen the flash, and my wife is sure she saw nothing. As to the noise, my wife heard a "bellowing" sound and a "squish," recalling fireworks; my son also heard a "bellow," while I seemed conscious of a sharp explosion. My wife describes her feeling as that of "dying away gently into darkness," and being roused by a tremendous blow on the body, where the chief mark was afterwards found. My son and myself were conscious of a sudden and terrific general disturbance, and he affirms that he received a severe and distinctly electrical shock in both legs. My left arm, shoulder, and throat especially suffered violent disturbance, but I did not think it was electrical. As I turned to help my wife, who was on the ground, I shouted, as I thought, that I was unhurt, and hoped they were also, but it seems I only uttered inarticulate sounds, and my son, in his first attempt to answer, did the same. This, however, was only momentary; in an instant we both spoke plainly.

Neither of us referred the occurrence immediately to its true cause, but the idea of being fired at was present to all our minds, my wife indeed remained of opinion that she was shot through the body, until she heard me speak of lightning. An infinitesimal lapse of time enabled my son and myself to recognise lightning; but I cannot say whether I did so before or after my first glimpse of the wreck on the ground. Neither of us heard or saw the mast fall, though it descended fifty feet, and fell on hard gravel close to us. My son and myself both experienced a momentary feeling of intense anger against some "person or persons unknown," further showing that we primarily referred the shock to some conscious agency. I ought perhaps to add, that neither of us felt any sensation of fear at the time; but we were all very nervous for several days after.

I have endeavoured to keep to fact throughout, but I venture to add a remark made by my wife as we raised her from the ground: "I feel quite sure that death from lightning must be absolutely painless;" and I offer it as an unconscious corroboration of views on this subject which our experience seems to strengthen.

Though no electrician, I conclude from the splash of gravel on the garden roller that the discharge was from cloud to earth, and the oxidised mooring-chains being inadequate to carry it all to ground, my wife formed a conductor for one of many sprays flying in all directions from the broken links.

Paignton, March 10

D. PIDGEON

#### Mr. G. Darwin's Paper on Cousin Marriages

THE report in the *Times* of my paper on Cousin Marriages, read before the Statistical Society on Tuesday, the 16th inst., contains an important error. It is there made to appear that out of 8,170 lunatics and idiots in England and Wales, 4,308 were offspring of first cousins. This should have run:—Answers with respect to the parentage of 4,308 out of the 8,170 patients were obtained; 142 to 149 of these were stated to be offspring of first cousins, that is to say, nearly  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. Similarly, out of 514 patients in Scotland, 51 per cent. were found to be offspring of first cousins.

I had hoped that the monstrous nature of the mistake would have shown it to be a misreport; but although the error was pointed out in the next day's *Times*, I have already had my attention drawn to it several times, and you would therefore be conferring a great favour on me by giving further publicity to the correction in your columns.

GEORGE DARWIN

Down, March 21

#### Mounting Acari for the Microscope

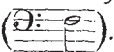
I HAVE much pleasure in detailing, for the benefit of your correspondent Mr. R. C. Fisher, a method I practised extensively some years since, and with the best possible results, in preparing Acari for the cabinet. The section then occupying my attention was the group of the *Hydrachnidae*, or "Water Mites," and to illustrate which I possess some hundred slides representing twenty or thirty species in various conditions of development. In first attempting to preserve these as permanent objects for the microscope I encountered difficulties similar to those of Mr. Fisher; the little animals being hard to kill, and their limbs in death doubling beneath to the great detriment of their personal appearance. As an experiment, I tried immersing them in boiling water, and was rewarded by finding this treatment to achieve everything that could be desired, death being instantaneous, and with the limbs rigidly extended in perfect symmetry. This method proved equally efficacious with various earth mites, such as *Trombidium*. A watch-glass, spirit lamp, and camel's hair brush is all the apparatus necessary. The occupation of other and larger "fish to fry" has unfortunately prevented my prosecuting the study of this most interesting group of the Arachnida so far as I first proposed.

Manchester Aquarium

W. SAVILLE-KENT

#### The "Wolf" in the Violoncello

CAN any of your readers explain the reason of the unpleasant jarring noise which is sometimes found in certain notes of the violoncello, termed by musicians the *wolf*?

In an instrument in my possession the *wolf* exists on one note only, viz., the F of the bass clef (). This is not due

to a defect in the string, as the same note stopped on the G string still produces the *wolf*.

It seems, therefore, that from some defect in the instrument itself, it is unable to vibrate in conjunction with a string having a certain rate of vibration, though it will take up the vibrations of every other but this particular note.

HERBERT F. FRYER

#### Coloured Shadows

SIX Grove's cells were connected with one of Ladd's large induction coils, and the secondary current, condensed by two large Leyden jars, was sent, in the usual way, between two pairs of metallic electrodes, in order to examine their spark spectra.

Two of the electrodes were of platinum: these may be called pair A.

Of the other pair, B, one electrode was of platinum, and the other of the metal to be examined.

Place a piece of white paper equidistant from, and on one side of, the two sparks. Hold the finger so that a shadow of it may